

WASHINGTON AND NAPOLEON.

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THE superiority of virtue, over mere genius, was probably never exemplified on a scale of greater magnificence, or more completely demonstrated, than in the lives and fortunes of these two illustrious persons. As a man of genius Napoleon was without doubt superior to Washington, but his virtues bore no comparison to those of the other. In the activity and comprehensiveness of his mind; in that clearness of perception which enabled him to foresee and overcome the obstacles which impeded his course, and achieve an unparalleled succession of triumphs, few men either of ancient or modern times equaled him. In these respects, Washington was not his peer perhaps; and yet, when we consider the relative positions of the two, I am inclined to believe he was not much his inferior. He certainly excelled him in wisdom, though he may have been his inferior in genius.

The mind of Washington was equal to the full and entire comprehension of the sphere in which he acted; and his sagacity in pointing out the probable events of the future, as well as guarding against either present or remote contingencies, is everywhere strikingly displayed, not only in his acts but opinions. His letters to Congress, during the progress of the Revolution, are principally occupied with pointing out approaching danger, or recommending the best means for avoiding it; and it cannot be doubted, that had his advice and exhortations been properly attended to, the struggle for liberty would have been far less protracted and sanguinary. But he was not, like Napoleon, an absolute monarch or leader, the master of his people. He was the servant of his countrymen, and could advise, but not direct nor control their actions or opinions, except by the force of his reasoning and the weight of his character. These constituted almost the only authority he exercised, except in his military capacity; and thus situated, his means were never in any degree correspondent with the greatness of his designs, or the difficulties which beset him at every moment of his military career. We are not, therefore, to judge of his talents by the victories he gained, but by the defeats which he avoided; and his crowning merit as a warrior is, that of having performed great things with weak instruments and comparatively insignificant means.

Napoleon, on the contrary, in the more early stages of his career, was the absolute leader of an infuriated multitude; a nation of thirty millions of people, acting under the influence of an enthusiasm of which the world furnishes few examples, as to its extent or its consequences. This alone had previously, under leaders of far inferior capacity, achieved a succession of victories over the veteran troops of Europe. Napoleon placed himself at the head of an irresistible impulse, which was sufficient in itself to carry him to the summit of glory. As emperor, he reaped the

benefits of this national enthusiasm, which had resulted in the formation of a warlike nation and armies inured to victory, as well as rendered all but invincible by an ardor almost equal to enthusiasm, a confidence the result of a long series of successes amounting to prodigies. With such instruments, aided by the possession of absolute power over a rich and mighty people, it was comparatively easy to conquer nations, governed by enfeebled monarchs reigning over subjects rendered unwarlike by having for centuries relied on standing armies for protection, and disaffected or indifferent toward a government of which they experienced little but the oppressions. But had he been placed in the situation of Washington, equally circumscribed in his means and his authority, there is every reason to believe that for want of the virtues of that pure and illustrious man, rather than from any inferiority of genius, he would have failed in accomplishing the great object of freeing his own country, or subjecting others.

Napoleon was inferior to Washington in patriotism. He was not born in France; it was not his native land, endeared to him by the ties and associations of childhood. He loved glory better than France, and sacrificed his adopted country on the altar of insatiable ambition. Without doubt, the position he occupied often entailed on him the necessity of warring in self-defence, even when he seemed the aggressor. It was indispensable that he should be Cæsar or nothing; to overturn the thrones of others, or cease to reign himself. In this point of view, they may be called defensive wars, partaking in the sentiment of patriotism, because the glory and safety of France were identified with his own. But these motives, however they might have mingled incidentally with other more powerful incitements, cannot justify his conduct toward Spain, or his invasion of Russia. His throne was too well established at these times to fear either one or the other, and an impartial posterity, while it pardons many of his apparent aggressions, will, in all probability, denounce these as the offspring not of patriotism but of a boundless ambition, incapable of being satiated by the acquisition of glory or power.

If we turn toward Washington, we shall see at a glance that ambition, if it at all influenced his acceptance of the command of armies which scarcely had an existence at the time, was only a latent motive, that, of itself alone, could not have stimulated him to assume a station which presented in perspective a very remote and doubtful triumph on one hand, an ignominious death on the other. He was undoubtedly fully aware of the obstacles, difficulties and discouragements which presented themselves on every hand; of the power of the invader and the weakness of his opposers. That he accepted this arduous and discouraging command with doubt and hesitation is

apparent from the letter he wrote to Mrs. Washington, announcing that event, as well as the testimony of his nearest connections, whom he either consulted, or who witnessed his struggles. The love of his country, and a sense of her wrongs, were, without doubt, the great, if not the sole motives which induced him to take on his shoulders a burthen perhaps as great as ever man bore, and to persevere in bearing it in the midst of disappointment and defeat, joined to unmerited censure and national ingratitude. That the desire of gain did not in the least influence his decision is apparent, from his stipulating that he should receive nothing for his services but the remuneration of his actual expenditures; and that the love of power was equally absent from his mind, is demonstrated by its resignation the moment his country was free.

The ambition of Washington was a virtue, that of Napoleon a vice. The limits of the one was the freedom and independence of his country; that of the other the subjugation of a world. One struggled for the rights of his countrymen; the other aimed at prostrating the rights of nations. One freed, the other enslaved his country. Finally, Washington drove the enemy from his native soil, while Napoleon eventually drew his enemies into the heart of France, to subjugate her capital, levy contributions, and reinstate on the throne the very family whose misgovernment had involved her in so many calamities.

In dignity of mind; in patience under privation; in fortitude under calamity and disappointment; in forbearance under provocation; in self-possession under misfortune, and moderation in success, Washington was far above Napoleon, who knew how to command others but not himself. The finest feature in the composition of Washington, and that which gives him a superiority over all other characters in history, was that equal and harmonious combination of qualities which distinguished both his head and his heart. They formed a consummate whole; a perfect edifice, every part of which corresponded with the other, and the apparent greatness of which is diminished in the contemplation of its symmetry. Instead of having our admiration attracted to any one particular point, or our wonder excited by some monstrous disproportion, the mind dwells with a delightful complacency on the perfect whole, as the eye rests on the calm beauties of a summer sunset, when nature combines all her harmonies in one, and exhibits at a single view her greatness and her beauty. There was no master-passion in his mind, swallowing up or overshadowing all the rest; and in his virtues there was nothing excessive. We see no camel's hump in the formation of his mind; no disproportioned projection producing wonder without exciting admiration. Like the star of the mariner, he was always the same; always shining bright and clear without dazzling the eye; always pointing one way, "true as the needle to the pole."

Nor do I believe that, on a closer examination, his military genius will suffer much in comparing it with that of Napoleon. To combine and direct small means to the successful attainment of great ends, is, in my opinion, evidence of greater skill, than is ex-

hibited in the conduct of vast enterprises, with means fully adequate to the object. The direction of a small, ill-provided, undisciplined, and discontented army, dispirited by past disasters, and anticipating others to come, is certainly not less difficult than leading a well constituted force, provided with every thing necessary, and flushed with victory, to new conquests. In one case, patience, fortitude, forbearance, perseverance, an insight into human motives and passions, and a consummate skill in their management, is indispensable; in the other, the machine may be said to govern itself, and perform its evolutions by the innate force of its own principles of action. All critics in the art of war unite in placing the difficulties of conducting a defensive war far above those of an offensive one, and giving the preference, not to the general who gains the victory, which is often a mere affair of accident, but to him who maintains a successful defence against a superior force, and preserves his army in the midst of disaster and defeat. I know not among all the great actions of Napoleon one displaying greater intrepidity, enterprise and skill, than was exhibited by Washington at the successive battles of Trenton and Princeton; and if we are to estimate their importance by their consequences, the most celebrated conflicts of ancient and modern times, where hundreds of thousands were engaged, and tens of thousands fell, become insignificant in the comparison. History records that these bloody and tremendous contests produced for the most part no permanent results. The possession of a town, or, at most, the temporary occupation of a portion of the country, was all that was acquired in exchange for the sacrifice of hecatombs; and even when victory led to the conquest of states, experience has generally shown, that the final result was a restoration of the spoil to its ancient proprietors, or another change of masters in the person of some new conqueror. But these victories of Washington, though gained by small numbers, over numbers not much greater, were followed by consequences at this moment far more momentous than all those of Napoleon combined. They laid a foundation for the successful termination of a struggle which gave liberty to a new world, and whose principles are now at work to achieve a similar triumph in the old. The victories of Napoleon have all ended in merely transferring France from the dynasty of Bourbon to that of Orleans.

Still, the unsullied glory of Washington must ever rest more on his virtues than on his genius; and it is for this reason he has now become, and will remain, so long as the records or traditions of past times are preserved, one of the bright, if not the brightest light of future ages; the safest and noblest example for imitation; the model of a patriot; the incarnation of the spirit of a republican hero. In his life and actions, both in public and private, we see the triumph of virtue, and what wonders she can accomplish. It is there most clearly demonstrated, that it is not alone to the qualities of the head that men are indebted for the brightest honors, the most imperishable fame, but that those of the heart have a still higher claim to the admiration of mankind. In his person, virtue may be

said to have resumed her lawful supremacy, and the example cannot but have the most salutary effects, by giving to public admiration a proper direction, and to public gratitude the noblest object of devotion. In most other heroes the splendor of their achievements throws all their defects and vices into the shade; but had not Washington been finally successful, he would have stood where he stands now, with only this difference, that instead of being the deliverer, he would have been equally venerated as the great martyr of his country.

The fate of these two great men of modern times has been as different as was the constitution of their minds. One was crushed under the vast fabric of ambition he had reared on the necks of millions, and cemented with their blood; the other rose to the highest pinnacle of glory, by limiting his ambition to giving liberty to his country. He did not, like Napoleon, after quelling foreign enemies, turn his sword on her bosom, and become a still more deadly foe by enslaving her himself. The moment of his greatest triumph was when, instead of fomenting the discontents of an army which, under his auspices, had freed the country, and making it the instrument of riveting her chains, he sternly rebuked the incendiaries who had incited it almost to mutiny, and, by the authority of his name and his virtues, at once crushed the meditated treason. The second great triumph was when, having finished the war and secured the liberties he had so long toiled to attain, he surrendered his sword to the President of Congress, at Annapolis. The third and last was, when, after eight years of labor as chief magistrate, in maturing the infant government, establishing its foreign and internal policy, and, in a great measure, perfecting its practical operation, he finally, while still in possession of all his faculties, and of the love and veneration of his country, retired from public life, and at one and the same moment gave to his successors an example of sublime moderation, to his fellow-citizens one of the noblest lessons of political wisdom that ever emanated from the pen of mortal man. What a contrast to the fate of Napoleon, who was unquestionably among the greatest of men, and who wanted nothing to make him perhaps the greatest the world ever saw, but the virtues of Washington.

Without doubt the different spheres of action in which these two illustrious men respectively moved, may have had a material influence on their character and conduct. Both undoubtedly frequently acted under the pressure of impelling circumstances, or strong necessity. I do not, therefore, join in echoing the indiscriminate censures heaped on the head of Napoleon by that bitter, unscrupulous, and unrelenting spirit which is characteristic of the British press. During the latter years of his life he was contending with England for the empire of the Old World, as is now sufficiently demonstrated in the preponderance assumed by that power since his downfall, and in such a struggle there is no other alternative than the submission or annihilation of one or other of the parties. What therefore appears to us the frenzy of unchastened ambition, may have been nothing more

than self-defence, which is sometimes, nay often, compelled to assume an offensive attitude of prevention. It is not always that the invader is the aggressor; and it is at all times perfectly justifiable to anticipate a blow we see coming, by striking the adversary beforehand. Nor do I wish to elevate Washington at the expense of another. He cannot shine brighter by the force of contrast or through any invidious comparisons. He is among the greatest of men, because he possessed the greatest virtues, and was blessed by Providence with a vast and comprehensive sphere for their exercise. With him the Temple of Fame is the Temple of Virtue.

The grand structure sought to be reared by Napoleon has fallen and buried that mighty mortal under its ruins. He attempted to push the world aside from its course, and succeeded for a time. But the bow seems to have been bent the wrong way, and finally broke, or recoiled on himself. His actions were splendid almost beyond comparison, and his genius equally grand. But I apprehend there was some great fundamental error in the course of his career, and cannot help suspecting it was in not giving liberty to France. It would seem that nothing can permanently flourish which is founded in a radical principle of wrong. Kingdoms may be conquered, nations trodden under foot, and for a brief period it may seem that force is triumphant over right, but there is a worm in the chaplet of glory acquired by such means which will soon cause it to wither and die. There is a natural, irresistible tendency in every thing deranged by violence to come in its right place again, either by a speedy reaction, or by going round in a circle, and ending where it began. It would seem that truth alone is everlasting, and that nothing can permanently endure which is founded in wrong or hostile to virtue.

The career of Napoleon ended in hopeless exile, on a barren rock in the lone and melancholy ocean; that of Washington closed in more than meridian splendor, amid the blessings of his country and the increasing admiration of the world. One left behind him little else than the wrecks of his career; the other founded a vast confederation, every day increasing in space, in numbers and prosperity, and which will continue to do so, only just in proportion as it adheres to his maxims and imitates his example. Napoleon was a bright but scorching luminary, scourging the earth with consuming fires; Washington a genial sun, mild yet radiant; enlightening without dazzling; warming without consuming. Both exhibit great moral lessons to the contemplation of mankind; one as a solemn warning, the other as a glorious example.

They were emphatically the two great men of the age, and naturally come into comparison with each other, not only on that score, but because, singular as it may seem, they both greatly contributed to the liberties of mankind; one directly, by building up a magnificent edifice of Freedom in the New World; the other incidentally, by prostrating the ancient fabrics of despotism in the Old, and demonstrating the utter weakness of kings, when unsupported by the confidence and affections of the people.